



PARADIGM SHIFT: EDUCATIONAL HUB FROM DARJEELING TO SILIGURI IN POST COLONIAL PERIOD

Satarupa Sarkar

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Dhupguri Girls' College, Dhupguri, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal

ABSTRACT

Darjeeling Hill station was a creation of the colonial govt. It was a fast developing town among the Hill stations of British India. Along with its growth as a sanatorium, it emerged as an educational centre especially the hub of English medium schools and convents. In this direction the major role was played by various missionary associations. It was found that Darjeeling hills including Kurseong and Kalimpong attracted students not only from different parts of British India, princely states of India but also neighbouring countries of Bhutan and Nepal. But in the post colonial period specially during and after the Gorkha land movement Darjeeling hills witnessed a massive decline as an educational hub. Side by side Siliguri a fast growing town of Darjeeling district in the plains, is becoming the fast growing educational centre of English medium schools lagging behind Darjeeling hills. The present paper is an attempt to view the reasons behind such major shift of an educational hub of the colonial period to a fast growing town in the post colonial period. Darjeeling hills is the only hill station of the state of West Bengal situated in its northern part. On the other hand Siliguri town, rapid growing city and the only municipal corporation not only in the district of Darjeeling but also in North Bengal. In preparing this paper multi disciplinary will be followed.

KEYWORDS: Sanatorium, Gorkha, Educational Hub, Missionary

INTRODUCTION

Darjeeling is the northernmost district in the state of West Bengal. It lies between 26.31 and 27.13 North latitude and between 87.59 and 88.53 East longitude. The northern boundary common says on the west at the peak of Phalut tri junction of the boundary of Nepal Sikkim and India. This boundary goes East from Falut through a ridge and descends on Rammam river. The boundary from this reaches in the forest of Jalpaiguri District following the course of the river Rammam and Teesta. The district is bounded by Nepal on the west. The Western boundary from fallout rain the South word reach until it joins the machi river which continues as the boundary right up to plains. Hence by the boundary of Nepal up to the South Western corner of the district. On the south lies the district of Purnea and West Dinajpur intercepted by the Mahananda river and on the east the district is bounded by Bangladesh and Jalpaiguri District.¹ Siliguri subdivision is one of the subdivisions of Darjeeling consisting of the Siliguri Municipal corporation and four community development blocks namely Matigara, Naxalbari, Phansideowa Khoribari. The earliest inhabitants of Darjeeling were the lepchhas. From the beginning of the 17th century a large group of bhutias from the Kham-Andong region of eastern Tibet settled in the district. The lepchhas and the limbu's were pre literate peoples processing their own animistic religions, Lahtsun Chhembo, the Guru of the first king of Sikkim, Penchoo Namgyal, introduced Lamaist Buddhism into this area and the lepchhas soon accepted the new faith. The script of the lipcha language to was evolved about the time after the roundular variety of the Tibetan script known as Bu-Can (pronounced as U-che) the total bulk of the contemporary literature written in the lecture script would not be more than a hundred volumes being translation from Tibetan of lamaist Buddhist scriptures which conveyed knowledge of beliefs and practices of lamaist Buddhism.²

Educational Development of Darjeeling during Pre-colonial era: After gaining political dominance over the people of India

in 1858, British government immensely focused on improving and modification western education in India. By the Charter Act (1813) the Company welcomed the penetration of western education and also granted an appropriation of 1 Lakh rupees for the benefit of primary education in English in India. This annual expenditure was mainly paid for the education sector. The most important aspect of the charter act (1813) was that it was for the first time company to give a special importance to the state for the advancement of education in India. This 1813 Act allowed Christian Missionaries to enter India without restriction, but more privileges were granted to missionaries from the United Kingdom. By this Act, various missions were sent from foreign countries like Germany and America. Wood's Despatch of 1854³ mostly known as the "Magna Carta" of British Education in India is a seminal chapter in the history of modern India for the purpose of advancement of English education. Through this Despatch India's education system was rapidly modernized in terms of organization and sustainability. In this regard Missionaries and non-missionaries amalgated perfectly to play an unprecedented role in educational activities. The scheme was an extensive infrastructure for primary education in one side and higher education in other side. By this process of modernification of education, 171 institution in Darjeeling Terai region, Calcutta University in January 1857, Bombay University in July 1857, Madras University in September 1857 were established. However the growth of western education was not much successful in the rural and northern part of Bengal. Especially Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Dinajpur and Malda were hardly influenced by this British educational system. It is observed that this Wood's Despatch did not accept the 'Downward Filtration Theory'⁴ and opted a system of education from lower level (primary level) to the higher level. (university stage). Moreover, when the British occupied the charges of Darjeeling as administrator, popular education was completely unknown. Some of the upper classes tried to train their children privately and some of them eager to educate their children by Tibetan or budhhist monasteries for the sake of education. But

the real education in general were found hardly in few schools were in existence.⁵

During the Pre Colonial period, the Gorkha movement created an atmosphere of political unrest in Sikkim. In 1814 it was decided to go to war against the Gorkhas to settle the unrest. The war ended with the Treaty of Titalia in 1817. The East India Company's arbitration in Sikkim took another dimension. In 1887 when dispute between Sikkim and neighboring countries started, Captain Lloyd and J.W. Grant, two representatives working in Malda to arbitrate the dispute informed Lord Bentinck in 1829 of the natural beauty politico-cultural potential of this hilly region. Thus Darjeeling surrounded by Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan and beyond as the political commercial and social centre of the region is seen as a beginning of development.⁶ Macfarlane appointed three sub-inspectors to look after mission schools, one for Terai, another inspects the school around Darjeeling and the third for Kurseong.⁷ When a large number of Europeans and British settled permanently in Darjeeling city, the thought of future education system for their children started. Educational infrastructure for European and Anglo-Indian children was thought to follow a similar path as early education systems were started in Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong by Christian missionaries.⁸

In 1835, Darjeeling was included as a part of British India. So far whose tireless efforts deserve mention in the advancement of the educational system have been Christian Missionaries, govt and private initiatives. The DPI therefore wrote to Jackson, Dr. Campbell, Captain James and Robinson to set up a government school at Darjeeling very soon and to take immediate action in that regard.⁹

The earliest of European schools in the district was Loreto convent for girls founded in 1846. The Loreto nuns of the Irish Roman Catholic Loreto Order managed it. In April 1846, Dr. Carew, Archbishop of Calcutta, asked the Loreto Sisters to open a branch school of Loreto House Calcutta in Darjeeling, which had an excellent climate and envisioned education of the highest caliber. Till 1874 all the schools in Terai were managed by the Scottish Christian Missionaries.¹⁰ Fr. Henri Depelchin founded St. Joseph's School Darjeeling on 13 February 1888. St. Joseph's School, a private Catholic school for boys in Darjeeling, commonly called North Point, is in Singamari, between Darjeeling and Lebong. After that St. Paul's Darjeeling (1864), oldest schools for Europeans in Kurseong is the Victoria Boys school established. A study conducted between 2012 and 2014 observed that the elite schools established in Darjeeling during the late 19th century for the education of British children were offering English-medium instruction of high quality to Indian children.¹¹ The same study suggested that the private schools were no longer catering only to children of the affluent.¹²

Post Colonial changes in education system of Darjeeling

The Gorkhaland movement is a campaign to create a separate state of India in the Gorkhaland region of West Bengal for the Nepali speaking Indians. The proposed state includes the hill regions of the Darjeeling district, Kalimpong district and Dooars regions that include Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and parts of Cooch behar districts. A demand for a separate administrative unit in Darjeeling has existed since 1909, when the Hillmen's Association of Darjeeling submitted a memorandum to Minto-Morley Reforms demanding a separate administrative setup.¹³ The students' have been directly or indirectly involved in the agitation of 2017. There is a long history of participation of students in the strikes worldwide. Students sometimes participate in the agitation for the educational issues such as

reduction of the fees, process of admission, improvement in the resources, campus conditions, lack of infrastructural facilities, poor administration of institution, economic or social concerns in which they register their presence as a stakeholder of the society/nation. (UGC 1960) (Rojas, 2011).

The activities during the agitation in which participation of students can be witnessed are students' union, rallies, picket line participation, participation in a public demonstration, office occupation, and other types of support (Giguere & Lalonde, 2010) but it can be understood easily these kinds of activities, distance the students from academics and eventually it affects their academic performance and the same thing can be seen as a result of students' participation in the agitations (directly or indirectly) in the Darjeeling hills. The Gorkha-Land Movement caused a massive educational collapsed in Darjeeling. Both the government and private stake holders of educational institutions were closed for a long time, many students separated from their normal studies. As a result the education system of Darjeeling suffered immense losses. More significantly the students from neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan Sri Lanka who used to come to study in Darjeeling thinking twice to come here. Paradigm shift is started to happening and many parents were forced to shift their children's place of education from Darjeeling to Siliguri.

Changing socio political scenario in Siliguri

According to Sailen Debnath, "Siliguri" means a stack of pebbles or stones. Until the 19th century this region was called as "Shilchaguri" when there was dense Dolka forest covering the region. Siliguri was a small agricultural village. It was captured by the Kingdom of Nepal in 1788, after which Kirati and Nepali Lepchas came to settle in this region.¹⁴ Due to tremendous growth, Siliguri is now far away from its past outlook, becoming the largest and fastest growing city in eastern India after Guwahati. The growth rate of Siliguri was 57.8% during 1971-1981. Considering this growth, Siliguri came under the Integrated Urban Development Project program in 1981. Siliguri population growth rate rose to 46.8% of 1981-1991. Between India and China for trade through Nathu La Pass, a treaty was signed and enriched identity of Siliguri as an international transportation and logistics hub. Later in 1994 Siliguri built a Municipal corporation which for the sake of civic infrastructure and administration of the city of Siliguri.¹⁵ Due to political unrest in Darjeeling many public sectors have started their investments by establishing new educational in different parts of Siliguri. Siliguri, West Bengal is known for its numerous CBSE and ICSE schools. In fact, there are more than 50 such schools in the city that serve to over 40,000 students each year. This makes it one of the most expedient destinations for parents and guardians looking for quality education for their children. Students even from states like Sikkim, Nagaland and Assam come here to pursue education. Many students from Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh also chose Siliguri for their studies. But the fact is that only a couple of decades ago there was only a few institutions. With the passage of time many government and non-government Schools, Colleges, Universities have established at the city of Siliguri and beyond it.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion reveals that the rapid growths of population along with urbanisation and rapidly emerging diverse economic functions have significantly transformed the natural landscape of Siliguri city. Siliguri has always been the hub of education in the Terai as well as the Dooars region. Apart from the residents of the town, students from states like Sikkim, Nagaland and Assam Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh.¹⁶ Siliguri

is a cosmopolitan city with Bengali, Bihari, Nepali, Marwari, and Punjabi people living peacefully. Siliguri became a rising cosmopolitan hub rather than any other region of Terai.

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3. Known as Wood's Despatch because it was drafted by Sir Charles Wood, the then President of the Board of Control, who later became the first Secretary of State for India
4. This meant that the allocated funds for education would be spent to educate limited number of pupils from the upper and middle classes who were expected to assume the task of educating the masses and spreading modern ideas among them. Education and modern ideas were thus supposed to filter or radiate downward from upper classes to general people or masses. This 'Downward Filtration Theory' remained the British policy till the end of the British rule even though it was officially abandoned in 1854.
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